

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:

November 14, 1997

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CONCLUSION OF THE 105TH CONGRESS -- FIRST SESSION -

Both the House and Senate have adjourned sine die until the fourth week in January, 1998.

FY98 AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS - As of November 14th, Agriculture Appropriations for FY98 remained unsigned at the White House. Department of Agriculture funding was included as part of a sixth Continuing Resolution (CR) numbered H.J. Res. 106, which provides interim funding for Federal Departments through November 26th. *NRCS Legislative Affairs staff will provide an update when the appropriations bill is signed.*

A FLURRY OF CONGRESSIONAL ACTIVITY AS FAST TRACK FAILS AND MEMBERS COMPLETE APPROPRIATIONS BILLS - Congress remained in session for much of the weekend of November 9th and 10th, and adjourned briefly in observance of the Veteran's Day federal holiday. Much of the time was focused upon consideration of legislation that would give the President traditional treaty negotiating authority. After an intensive lobbying campaign, the White House asked the legislation be withdrawn to be reconsidered again next year. During the hold-up in floor activity over the past week, Congress was able to speedily adopt other measures. Some of note include the following:

RESEARCH TITLE -

HOUSE PASSES H.R. 2534 - On Saturday, November 8th, the House passed legislation to reauthorize research and extension activities of the Department of Agriculture by a recorded vote of 291-125. The Senate version of the bill, S. 1150 was passed by the Senate on October 29th. Differences do exist between the two pieces of legislation, however, and must be reconciled before the bill is cleared for the President's signature.

FOREST HEALTH -

HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE PASSES H.R. 2515 - On Wednesday, November 5th, the Subcommittee on Forestry, Resource Conservation, and Research of the House Agriculture Committee (Chairman Combest, R-TX) approved legislation that would begin a five year program to identify and treat ailing forests. The bill, H.R. 2515, provides for a team of scientists to assess forest health and establish a ranking system for quantifying forest damage from insect infestation, disease, or over-harvesting. Rep. George Brown (D-CA) and others voiced concerns against the measure citing problems with the selection of the scientific panel and funding for the program. The bill may now be considered by the full Agriculture Committee.

AGRICULTURE CENSUS -

HOUSE CLEARS H.R. 2366 - On Monday, November 10th, the Senate passed H.R. 2366 by a voice vote. The measure, introduced by Rep. Charlie Stenholm (D-TX) proposes to transfer responsibility for conducting the census of agriculture from the Department of Commerce to the Secretary of Agriculture. The bill was passed by the House on October 21st and is now sent to the White House for endorsement.

DROUGHT PREPAREDNESS -

SENATE PASSES S. 222 - On Monday, November 10th, the Senate passed the National Drought Policy Act of 1997. The legislation, introduced by Sen. Pete Domenici (D-NM), calls for the formation of a Presidential Commission that will examine the role of federal agencies in response to drought situations, and also assess the state of federal preparedness for drought. The Secretary of Agriculture would serve as the chair of the Commission. Companion legislation has not been sponsored in the House.

EQIP HEARING/BRIEFING CANCELED - The House Agriculture Committee canceled a briefing and hearing scheduled for Nov. 3rd and 4th, respectively. A future briefing or hearing may be rescheduled at the Committee's request.

LEGISLATION OF NOTE-

The following bills of significance to NRCS and conservation were recently introduced:

Bill	Member	Purpose
H.R. 2762	Gilchrest (MD)	The legislation would make comprehensive changes to the Federal Water Pollution Control Act with respect to federal wetlands policies including delineation, permitting, and mitigation. Specifically, the bill adds "wetlands" to the definition of "navigable waters" and clarifies the meaning of "prior converted cropland".
H.R. 2911	Pombo/Herger (CA)	The legislation would waive provisions of the endangered species act to allow federal agencies to maintain or repair levee structures in response to catastrophic natural events, or where threats to public safety are eminent.
S. 1467	Smith (OR)	Forest Recovery and Protection Act of 1997 (Companion to H.R. 2515)

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LOOKING AHEAD:

2nd SESSION OF THE 105th CONGRESS - The 2nd session of the 105th Congress will begin on January 27, 1998. The President has been invited to present to Congress the State of the Union Address on that day. Although scheduling for the 2nd session is very tentative at this early stage, some possible dates have been discussed.

State of the Union	January 27
Presidents Day Recess	Feb. 13-23
Spring Recess	April 3-20
Memorial Day Recess	May 22- June 1
Independence Day Recess	June 26-July 6
Summer Recess	early Aug.-Sept. 7
Target election year adjournment	Oct. 9

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